

Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

(U. S. D. A. W.)



WAGES



HX

632

A1

W9


NO. 1692

MAIN

REPORT

Submitted by the Executive Council

to the 1963 Annual Delegate Meeting



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
University of Alberta Libraries

1. The special report on wages submitted by the Executive Council at the 1962 A.D.M. concluded as follows :

“ The Union’s position is, therefore clear :

- (1) It rejects the Government’s incomes policy which, by its emphasis on wage restraint, seeks to place the main burden of economic recovery on the shoulders of the wage earner.
- (2) It will pursue its applications for wage improvements based, as they are, on a realistic assessment of the needs of its members and the obligations of the Union to ensure for them a standard of living which is both adequate and commensurate with the duties and responsibilities involved.”

The report was adopted.

2. The following resolution was carried without opposition :

“ This A.D.M. calls upon the Executive Council to examine the entire strategy regarding wages and hours, particularly in the private trades, with a view to making such variations as may be necessary to help the recruitment of new members.”

3. The following resolution was also carried without opposition :

“ This A.D.M. rejects the Tory Government’s policy on the wages pause and the continued rise in cost of living.”

4. In addition to accepting the Executive Council’s report and the aforementioned resolutions, the Annual Delegate Meeting also carried the following resolution on a card vote by 178,357 to 68,547 :

“ This A.D.M. notes with concern that the £10 minimum demanded in 1960 has not yet been achieved in all sections. It nevertheless recognises that taking into account the varied occupations for which we cater as a Union, inevitable fluctuations in the cost of living inherent in a Capitalist economy, references to a target figure for a basic wage rate which has to be amended annually are unrealistic. It therefore instructs the Executive Council to lay down the following basic principles in all future negotiations :

- (a) A Union evaluation of the jobs for which negotiations are taking place.
- (b) The need to establish the highest possible standard of living for distributive workers and other sections of our membership.
- (c) That agreements should reflect the increasing importance of skilled distributive and their allied workers in the national economy.

Finally, that the policy of continuing review of wage rates shall again be emphasised because of the need at all times to maintain the highest possible basic wages rates.”

5. Clearly, the Annual Delegate Meeting rejected outright the Government's pay pause and "Incomes Policy—The Next Step" presented to Parliament in February, 1962. The White Paper on Incomes Policy, "guiding light" suggested that increases should not exceed 2 to 2½ per cent a year. The alleged object of this unprecedented Government intervention in wages policy was to prevent increases in incomes from preceding or outstripping increases in national productivity. The value of the Government's appeal can be gauged by comparing it with what actually happened with wage rates in 1962. The increase in weekly wage rates of 4.4 per cent was about twice what the Government hoped when they published their White Paper.

6. The main mandate in what might be described as the leading resolution on wages carried at the 1962 A.D.M. was the laying down of certain basic principles in future negotiations ; in short, the need to establish the highest possible standard of living for our membership.

7. Each year the Annual Report summarises in the appropriate sections details of wage applications and settlements. The period covered in the Annual Report is the previous calendar year, January to December. It is no exaggeration to say that the period reviewed has proved to be the most difficult and complicated in the last decade. Despite the complexity of the situation, there is once again indisputable evidence in the summary of wage settlements, of the exceedingly great amount of work and achievement in the direction of improved wages and conditions.

8. Activity in the sphere of wages during the year has been on no less a scale than in the preceding 12 months. Up to the date of preparing this report (March, 1963) 124 national and 149 district and local wage claims have been endorsed by the Executive Council, submitted to the various employers, and settlements reached. Of 124 national settlements affecting adult male workers, 49 were for increases of 10s. 6d. per week or more (in some instances increases of 20s. per week were secured); 57 ranged from 7s. 6d. to less than 10s. 6d.; and 18 were for less than 7s. 6d. One hundred national settlements affected adult female workers, the increases being as follows: 17 had 10s. 6d. per week or more; 41 from 7s. 6d. to less than 10s. 6d.; 42 from 5s. to less than 7s. 6d. In the principal voluntary agreements and statutory orders, increases for shop assistants ranged in descending order from (males) 12s. to 8s. 6d. (6.85 per cent to 4.94 per cent); females 10s. to 7s. (7.63 per cent to 5.16 per cent). These increases came after an interval of about 18 months after previous settlements. While these increases were on average lower than the previous settlements, it is impossible to make an accurate comparison of the increases secured in different trades without a detailed examination of wage levels, the dates of previous increases and other relevant circumstances.

9. It follows that, despite the wage pause and "guiding light" provided in the White Paper on incomes policy and the troublesome economic climate created as a result, the Executive Council has seriously endeavoured to keep faith with A.D.M. policy by maintaining their policy of pressing for substantially improved wage rates. Certainly, the increases secured must also be judged against the background of economic and social problems created as a result of Government policy, unequalled competitive conditions in retailing and distribution and a continuing upward trend in unemployment and threats of redundancy.

10. Here it is important to mention that the maintenance of the Union's National Trade Conference structure has afforded invaluable opportunity for the most thorough consultation and discussion with representatives of the membership concerned. This machinery is of inestimable value to the Union and is a highly important medium for discussing privately the tactics and timing of wage claims in selected trades.

11. It is impossible, in a report of this kind, to attempt to analyse the many settlements reached on claims since the last A.D.M. It is, however, appropriate to briefly refer to improvements secured in the principal sectors of the distributive trades for which U.S.D.A.W. is the Union wholly or mainly responsible. In Retail Co-operative Service, a claim was submitted early in 1962 for an increase of 20s. per week on all adult rates (male and female 21 years and over) subject to the rates for adult females being raised to 80 per cent of the corresponding male rate where currently below that figure, and proportionate increases on the junior rates. The Annual Report indicates the difficulties encountered in the negotiations. The difference between the parties was referred to the National Conciliation Board and the award of the Independent Chairman was given later.

12. In the Private Retail Distributing Trades, claims were submitted to the nine Wages Councils for increases in the statutory minimum rates of 20s. for adult workers, with appropriate increases for juniors, together with a proposal to raise the proportion of women's rates to men's rates to 80 per cent where at present below that figure. Similar claims were submitted for improvements in the minimum rates for voluntary agreements and a summary of settlements reached is also recorded in the Annual Report.

13. Applications similar to those made in the national claims were submitted to retail firms with which the Union held agreements or had established negotiating arrangements. The increases secured closely corresponded to settlements reached in national voluntary agreements. The Union's longstanding policy to extend voluntary agreements to retailing and distribution was brought one step nearer by the establishment of a voluntary wages agreement with a leading London West End store. The immediate effect of the agreement was to give general increases of a substantial amount to full-time staff, with proportionate increases

to part-time staff. The agreement also incorporates an arrangement, similar to that in operation elsewhere, on facilities for the collection of Union contributions.

14. During the year, the Union has also intensified its demand for the five-day working week. There is a clear indication that the activity and pressure of the Union to extend the five day working week in the retail trades is responsible for bringing about a positive attitude and keener appreciation of the claims for workers employed in retailing and distribution to have greater leisure. During the year, local authorities made Early Closing Day Exempting Orders for certain areas permitting six-day opening. In each instance the Union has been actively engaged in campaigns designed to secure the adoption of five-day week working, resulting in a good deal of success. Agreements have been drawn up providing for these new arrangements, which are now in operation in an increasing number of firms. The Union will continue unabated its demand for this objective, but it cannot be too strongly emphasised that the extent of the success, now and in the future, will depend in the main on the degree of support received from distributive employees as a body.

15. A statement on wages and hours would be incomplete without examining prospects for the Union's members. We have heard much talk lately about the future of Britain's economy and the need to secure a 4 per cent growth in the national product. We have been told a great deal these last few months about the level of demand at which the economy should be operated, and the need for a satisfactory development of prices and incomes in order to ensure equal treatment to the different sections of the community. The Executive Council are in no doubt that reasonable stability of prices is generally desired by the Union's members, quite apart from the wider economic importance. *Equally, the Executive Council are firmly convinced that, as the cost of living continues to increase, our members will react in the only way possible. If incomes from profits, rents and capital gains continue to rise, it is expecting too much that wage and salary earners should continue to absorb rises in the essential goods and services without sooner or later setting up a demand for wage increases to meet them.* Those of us whose job it is to protect and improve our members' wages and conditions know and fully realise the probable consequences of scrambles of this kind, in which workers have always suffered the most. Even so, it is difficult, almost impossible, to expect wage and salary earners represented by this Union to display higher codes of conduct than other sections of society.

16. In these circumstances, the importance of Government policy can hardly be over-exaggerated. Apart from serious and increasing unemployment and insecurity, with its grave individual problems, there is no real evidence at the time of preparing this report of anything tangible being done to bring to a halt the wasteful competitive forces that have increased with amazing rapidity during the life of this Government. It is too early yet to assess what effect, if any, the

Government measures announced since October, 1962, will have in expanding the economy. Nor is there any genuine indication that Government policy that has been so manifestly unfair in the past to wage and salary earners, will in the future be inclined to accept an incomes policy based on "fair shares."

17. Because of the diverse number of trades covered by the Union's organisational structure, the problem of formulating and negotiating a wage claim presents itself in a number of different ways. It will, for example entail reconciling, in certain sectors where the Union is wholly or mainly concerned, a contracting sphere of trading influence and consequential trading difficulties, with demands on behalf of the Union's membership for improved basic wages and conditions. The Executive Council, therefore, recognise that, in accepting their obligation to improve minimum wage rates of members employed in retailing, distribution and in other trades and industries with which the Union is concerned, there are many questions which require careful examination in the setting of an application.

18. It may be thought that the rate of progress in satisfying the demands of the membership for substantially improved minimum wage rates is to some extent bound up with problems of wages structure. It may also be thought that wages structures which became effective immediately following the post-war period, may not be appropriate now. These and many other problems, the resultant effect of a changing pattern of retailing and distribution, are best discussed in the privacy of the Union's trade machinery structure where they can receive detailed attention.

19. To sum up, the Executive Council will, between now and the next A.D.M.,

- (a) pursue, where necessary, wage claims appropriate to the conditions of each trade and industry ;
- (b) maintain and, if possible, increase the pressure to improve working conditions of the Union's membership ; seek to extend the five-day working week over a wider field of retailing interests ;
- (c) seek to improve, where necessary, additional payments to match extra responsibility and special skills ;
- (d) renew with vigour, as part of the next wage claims, the objective of the Union of equal pay for equal work.

